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PROGRAMMING AND COORDINATION MATTERS RELATED TO THE UNITED NATIONS AND THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

Improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat

Report of the Secretary-General

INTRODUCTION

Commitment

1. As the Organization enters its fiftieth anniversary and prepares for the Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace, in 1995, it is appropriate to recall that the Charter of the United Nations sets the foundation of the commitment to create conditions of equality and opportunity for women and men of the highest calibre. In resolutions 48/108, 49/167 and 49/222, the General Assembly refers to the shared responsibility of Member States and the Secretary-General in this regard, identifying the diverse and complementary roles of each. In these as well as in previous relevant resolutions, the Secretary-General is entrusted with fulfilling specific mandates and achieving specific goals in improving the status of women in the Secretariat, in particular at decision-making levels. Guided by the resolutions, the Secretary-General has taken action to fulfil these mandated responsibilities to the extent possible. It is becoming increasingly clear, however, that the full involvement of Member States as active partners is required, if the objectives and goals set by the General Assembly are to be met. Thus, the strategic plan of action for the improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat (1995-2000), outlined in section IV of the Secretary-General's

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* E/CN.6/1995/1.

report (A/49/587 and Corr.1) envisages courses of action to be pursued by the Secretary-General and ways in which Member States can actively support the Secretary-General's efforts.

Mandates and targets

2. At its forty-ninth session, the General Assembly adopted resolutions 49/167 on the advancement of women and 49/222 on human resources management. In adopting these resolutions, the General Assembly endorsed the Secretary-General's proposed strategic plan of action for the improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat (1995-2000) and urged the Secretary-General to implement the plan fully and to include full implementation of the plan as a specific indicator in the performance appraisal of all managers.

Overall strategies

3. The year 1994 was marked by vigorous efforts by all concerned, particularly the Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) of the Secretariat, to integrate the goals and targets for the improvement of the status of women into the strategy for the management of the human resources of the Organization, set out in the report of the Secretary-General (A/C.5/49/5). It is the view of the Secretary-General that an integrated human resources management strategy, built around hiring, placing, promoting and maintaining the best staff for the Secretariat, is the most effective means of improving the status of women.

4. OHRM has also moved to involve the Focal Point for Women in the Secretariat in the processes of decision-making and information-sharing in the areas of recruitment, promotion and placement. OHRM has also moved to increase the authority and responsibility, as well as the accountability, of the Focal Point to enable her to develop and monitor the implementation of the strategic plan of action. The plan sets out to achieve gender balance by the year 2000 and overcome the entrenched obstacles to women's advancement through adopting an integrated, human resources management strategy.

5. The strategy for the management of the human resources of the Organization contained in the report of the Secretary-General (A/C.5/49/5), together with the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Advancement of the status of women in the United Nations Secretariat in an era of 'human resources management' and 'accountability': a new beginning?" (A/49/176, annex) and the report of the Steering Committee for the Improvement of the Status of Women in the Secretariat, has provided the impetus for major changes in the approach to women's advancement. Thus, succession planning, strategic staffing, career development, acceleration of promotion and recruitment of women and commitment to changing the management environment and culture have become important components of the strategic plan of action.

6. Section I of the present report contains a full account of the current status of women in Professional posts subject to geographical distribution, and the targets for the period 1995-2000 set by the General Assembly. Section II briefly describes the persisting obstacles to the achievement of those goals. Section III sets out the Secretariat's strategy for the year 2000 and beyond.

I. CURRENT STATUS OF WOMEN

A. Data and statistics

7. During the period 1989-1994, there was an overall increase of 5.7 per cent (from 26.9 to 32.6 per cent) in the representation of women in posts subject to geographical distribution in the Secretariat. The percentage of women at the D-1 level and above, which was 12.3 per cent as at 30 June 1993 had risen to 15.1 per cent by 30 June 1994. These figures, although showing steady progress, indicate that both in the overall percentages and in the proportion of women at the D-1 level and above, the Secretariat fell short in its efforts to meet the General Assembly's targets of 35 per cent overall in posts subject to geographical distribution and 25 per cent for levels D-1 and above.

8. A study undertaken by the Steering Committee for the Improvement of the Statu of Women in 1994 indicates that, of the 25 departments and offices surveyed, 10 have attained or exceeded the overall 35 per cent target and 5 have reached the 25 per cent target at the D-1 level and above. Statistics thus confirm the Secretary-General's conclusion that the pace of progress must be accelerated and such measures as those set out in the strategic plan of action should be adopted if decisive action is to be taken to meet the targets.

9. As indicated in table D1 in the report of the Secretary-General on the composition of the secretariat (A/49/527), in 1994 the representation of women in posts subject to geographical distribution, as a percentage of all staff, continued to show imbalances among regions and countries of origin. Eastern Europe (0.75 per cent), the Middle East (1.25 per cent) and Africa (2.94 per cent) registered the lowest representation of women among the regions. The highest percentages were registered by North America and the Caribbean (9.53 per cent), Western Europe (8 per cent) and Asia and the Pacific (6.78 per cent). It should be noted that the percentages for the Asia and the Pacific and the North America and the Caribbean regions are based on representation mainly from Asia and North America. The Pacific and the Caribbean regions are underrepresented. The regional imbalance is also reflected in the percentage of women staff grouped by region of origin as of 30 June 1994 (A/49/527, table D2).

B. Promotion and recruitment

10. Preliminary promotion and recruitment statistics indicate that, since the establishment of the placement and promotion system in November 1993 (see ST/AI/390 and Corr.1), more men than women were promoted and recruited at higher levels, with the exception of recruitment at the D-1 level.

II. OBSTACLES

11. Departmental heads, managers and supervisors provided their views of current constraints to the advancement of women through a survey conducted by the Steering Committee for the Improvement of the Status of Women in the Secretariat.

12. The survey showed that smaller departments away from Headquarters and regional commissions experience the most difficulties in filling vacancies and having access to women candidates. Larger departments, especially at Headquarters, fare better, presumably because they have better access to qualified women. But everywhere, it was more difficult to attract and recruit qualified women for higher levels. As of 30 September 1994, women were represented at the highest levels by 2 Under-Secretaries-General, 2 Assistant Secretaries-General, 14 D-2s and 33 D-1s; by comparison, there were 18 men at the Under-Secretary-General level, 16 at the Assistant Secretary-General level, 61 at the D-2 level and 196 at the D-1 level.

13. Among the constraints cited by programme managers to explain the disappointing progress in increasing the number of women in Professional posts, particularly senior policy-level posts, were a number of long-standing issues. For instance, the fact that qualified women candidates for posts subject to geographical distribution are often from over-represented countries; the lack of candidates from unrepresented or underrepresented countries; the small pool of women candidates with technical or specialized qualifications; and the fact that recruitment patterns in the 1970s favoured men, who now constitute the pool of internal candidates for promotion to the D-1 level and above. New issues mentioned by programme managers relate to the effects of restructuring and the fact that the recruitment freeze affected the ability of the Organization to meet its targets for women; the lack of competitive salaries; and the lack of opportunities for the employment of spouses.

14. The conclusions of the Steering Committee and the Joint Inspection Unit in its report (A/49/176, annex) indicate, however, that the major obstacles to the advancement of women are commitment at the highest levels and lack of a clearly articulated human resources management strategy.

III. THE STRATEGIC PLAN OF ACTION

15. As stated in the report of the Secretary-General (A/49/587 and Corr.1), the main goal of the strategic plan of action is to achieve gender equality by the beginning of the twenty-first century, through a gradual, phased and focused strategy based on attrition and on targeting vacancies for the promotion and recruitment of women. The strategic component of the plan shows that the overall target of 35 per cent can be attained by 1995 and that the target of 25 per cent at levels D-1 and above can be reached by 30 June 1997. The succession plan component prepares the way and the implementation component sets out the actions to be undertaken.

16. An important feature of the strategic plan of action is its integrated approach. The plan sets out strategies as well as specific objectives and targets, and identifies simultaneous and interrelated actions required to achieve them. Corrective or new measures envisaged in the plan relate to career development, management training and management culture change, including implementation of a new performance appraisal system; review and improvement of recruitment processes, including the application of technological innovation to increase the access of qualified women worldwide; support for women's training;

the introduction of more effective systems to deal with mobility and spousal employment; and measures and procedures to prevent sexual harassment.

17. The following elements of the strategy have been initiated and/or are operational: planning and database development; development of a specific roster of external candidates; a Secretariat-wide network of departmental focal points; broad advertising and communication; targeted recruitment missions; and review of the processes of recruitment and promotion and involvement of the departmental focal points in those processes.

18. Changes will be made in management culture and in policies regarding career development, training, mobility, dual career and spousal employment, in tandem with the Secretary-General's overall strategy for the management of the human resources of the Organization, endorsed by the General Assembly in resolution 49/222. Monitoring, appraisal and follow-up on issues specific to women will be an integral part of this process.

IV. CONCLUSION

19. The participation of women, in sufficient numbers and at levels that make a difference in decision-making and in all aspects of the work of the United Nations - as staff members and governmental representatives - is fundamental to shaping the role of the Organization as set out in its Charter.